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The Exorcist Massage Parlor

Necrophilia, the attraction to what is dead, decaying, lifeless, and purely mechanical, is increasing throughout our cybernetic industrial society. The Falangist motto, "Long live death," threatens to become the secret principle of a society in which the conquest of nature by the machine constitutes the very meaning of progress, and where the living person becomes an appendix to the machine.

ERICH FROMM

The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness

Audience Priming

The Exorcist dramatically proved—if this needed proving—that the motion picture industry was not averse to making a fast buck with subliminal technology. Director William Friedkin maximized the return on the film's capital investment, reportedly in the neighborhood of \$14 million, through

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a brilliant repertoire of visual and auditory subliminal innovations.

The Exorcist was not the first motion picture to use subliminal techniques. In 1957, the Precon Process and Equipment Corporation of New Orleans produced two experimental films heavily saturated with subliminal devices—*My World Dies Screaming* and *A Date with Death*. Neither film was ever publicly released. Friedkin must have used these films as a textbook.

The Exorcist audience was first primed or preconditioned for the subliminally induced emotional trip by the film's publicity: "The Exorcist is more than just a novel. A nightmare novel of demonic possession. See the movie! It's the most shocking thing that will ever happen to you!" warned Warner Brothers' promotional materials.

Preconditioning was apparent while audiences waited for the show to begin. Virtually everyone was on the edge of their seats. Conversations appeared nervous, laughter forced, and talk was often quite loud. Interviews indicated almost everyone had the same apprehensive thought, wondering how they would be affected by the film. When the lights finally dimmed and the curtain parted, the audience seemed to be holding their breaths in anticipation.

In technical terms, this priming experience is important to produce the most ideal perceptual conditions for subliminal stimuli. Yet, most of the priming publicity was absurd, the usual contrived nonsense—in this case overtly appealing to childlike fantasies of witches and evil forces. However, the public's reaction—as the film opened in major cities across the nation—was genuine. People really did faint in large numbers, many more became nauseous in varying degrees, a great many more had very disturbing nightmares. Several theater employees—in the theaters where interviews were taken—were actually placed under the care of physicians, and a few quit their jobs. Employees frequently had to clean up floors and rugs when nauseous patrons (mostly male, for some reason) did not quite make it to the rest rooms. In the several cities that were checked after the film had run several weeks, every major hospital receiving department had dealt with dozens of fainting, nausea, and hysteria cases. Hospital

emergency room physicians reported patients who appeared to be both hallucinating and extremely distraught.

Nine psychiatrists in a midwestern city, who agreed to be interviewed, reported they had all counseled disturbed patients who displayed "hysteria" as a result of the movie, ranging from one to eighteen patients for each psychiatrist.

There is virtually no way cognitive or consciously perceived stimuli could have produced this intensity of emotional disturbance. Human perceptual defenses are very well organized and will protect individuals from most potentially disturbing experiences. Even the dramatic illusions of Cinerama, when first introduced some years ago, produced only mild nausea or dizziness among a small handful of theater patrons.

The Poetzle Effect

Out of fifty individuals in a test group who saw the movie, only three could recall subsequent dreams that in any way appeared related over several weeks after the screening. Dr. O. Poetzle, one of Freud's contemporaries, postulated in his Law of Exclusion that dream content was comprised of subliminal or unconsciously perceived experiences. He demonstrated that dream data was often transformed or disguised within a familiar setting, but the dream's "real" content was derived from subliminal rather than cognitive or conscious perceptions.

Around 1917, Poetzle developed his subliminal stimuli theories from studies utilizing tachistoscopic displays and hypnosis. He was the first scientist to demonstrate the apparently close relationship between subliminal stimuli and posthypnotic suggestion. The Poetzle Effect involves a delayed action, or as he called it, a "time clock" phenomenon. His studies revealed that subliminal perceptions could evoke dreams and actions days, even weeks, after the original percept.

When individuals perceive a subliminal stimuli in print or in television advertising, they are consciously unaware of the percept. These hidden devices usually involve taboo sex or death content which program some individuals for the delayed reaction. Several weeks later, these sensitive individuals will notice the brand label in a supermarket. This second

conscious percept serves as a cue for action. Applying the Poetzle theorizations, a statistically significant proportion of consumers will purchase the product or dream about it after the second percept.

Several weeks after our test group had seen *The Exorcist*, photographic slides taken of the screen during the movie were shown.

Scenes included the actors' faces, staircases inside and outside the house, and the exorcism. The slide show lasted an hour, during which time several people left the room, reporting they had become nauseous. Almost the entire group reported severe depression after the showing. Many were openly annoyed at having to experience the slides. Comments included feelings of "agitation," "anger," "rage," "persecution," "fear," "extreme annoyance," "upset stomach," etc.

During the following week, well over half the group reported nightmares—unusual and vivid horror dreams clearly related to the movie. Many dreamed they were tortured and persecuted by the devil in one way or another. Several young women reported dreaming of sexual experiences involving the devil.

These effects were remarkable because this entire group had been involved with studies on subliminal phenomena for nearly two years. They generally knew how to discover and assess subliminal embeds and, at least from theory, understood the process and how it operated. Even so, it appeared they could not defend themselves from subliminal stimuli effects.

Media Psychopathology

The *Toronto Medical Post* reported, after *The Exorcist* had been shown for several weeks in that city, at least four young women had been confined for varying periods in a psychiatric hospital as a result of viewing the film. Subliminal induction techniques are capable of inducing various levels of depression and hysteria among some individuals. A majority of the film's audience would probably experience only momentary emotional unpleasantness. It might appear to some as even exciting. For a small minority, nevertheless, *The Exorcist* could indeed be threatening or even dangerous.

There is little psychological threat to an individual from anything consciously perceived. At the conscious level, humans can decide alternatives and rationalize their involvements in terms of morality, self interest, or conscious motives. The whole pornography issue, for example, is totally absurd. As long as an individual can decide consciously whether he will accept, reject, or consider, there is really no such thing as "harmful" information content

Subliminal stimuli, on the other hand, are far more insidious and believed responsible for attitudinal frames of reference, moods, emotional predispositions, and residual value systems. There is no possibility of rational decision making or defense, since consciousness is bypassed completely.

One of the most dramatic visual subliminal stimulation techniques in *The Exorcist* featured full-screen tachistoscopic displays. Numerous times during the movie there was a sudden flash of light and the face of Father Karras momentarily appeared as a large, full-screen death mask apparition—the skin greasy white, the mouth a blood-red gash, the face surrounded by a white cowl or shroud.

Muriel Schwartz, owner of the Capitol Theatre in Dover, Delaware, refused to permit a public examination of the film, but "out of curiosity" agreed to check it out herself. She had a projectionist unwind the reels to Father Karras's dream sequence and discovered a subliminal cut. "The face was a ghostly white," she explained, "with red outlines around the eyes and mouth." One of her employees saw the cut as "the face of the devil." She said the subliminal cut consisted of two frames spliced into the film.

Warner Brothers, who produced the film, refused to comment about the subliminal cuts but admitted their existence, claiming, "We thought everyone knew." One of Director Friedkin's assistants, Albert Shapiro, conceded, "It's not common knowledge that the film contains subliminal cuts." He denied their use in *The Exorcist* was a secret, however.

Despite their claim that they had nothing to hide, I was refused permission to reproduce six photographs for this book, taken in the theater during the movie. Warner's Chief Legal Counsel responded, "You are hereby notified that no license or permission is given for the use of any . . . photographs

taken of or from our motion picture 'The Exorcist.' You are further notified that Warner Bros. will take all legal steps necessary to prevent any such use of materials from 'The Exorcist,' whether such use is made by you or others."

The death mask was most often consciously perceived in two specific scenes. It appeared in the dream sequence, when Father Karras's mother came out of the subway entrance as he watched from across the street, and near the end of the exorcism after the older priest died and Karras attempted to murder Regan. The display flashed at 1/48 of a second. Many viewers believed the death mask flashes occurred at least four additional times, but there was disagreement over precisely in which scenes the flashes had been inserted. At the movie's climax, when Father Karras was finally possessed by the devil, his face turned white—closely resembling the tachistoscoped death mask.

After interviewing nearly a hundred individuals who had just viewed *The Exorcist*, it appeared that roughly one third consciously did not perceive the flashing death mask. One third were strangely uncertain whether they had seen it, and one third consciously recalled the display. Two thirds of the audience did not perceive the death mask. Many who consciously perceived the death mask, commented about forcing themselves to deal with their memory of the experience. Perhaps strangely, the movie's strongest emotional impact was among the one third who repressed the perception and consciously believed they saw nothing.

Tachistoscopic technique is long established and frequently used in television commercials. In a recent case, presently under investigation by the FCC and FTC, half a dozen single frames in a sixty-second commercial for a child's toy called "Husker Du?" were inserted with the command "Get it!" The commercial was nationally broadcast during children's programs before Christmas in 1973.

Two patents on subliminal induction equipment—including the tachistoscope—are owned by Dr. Hal Becker of Tulane University's Medical School. Dr. Becker, a biological communication engineer, has used these induction techniques to treat psychoneurosis. He claims to have lowered diastolic blood pressure (hypertension) with subliminal tachistoscopic dis-

plays. Slow-speed consciously perceivable tachistoscopes, ranging from 1/10 to 1/150 of a second, are regularly used in language training programs. High-speed tachistoscopes, however, flash images or commands at 1/1,000 to 1/4,000 of a second, repeating the flash every so many seconds. Currently, these machines are employed in universities, research corporations, and advertising agencies, but are generally considered obsolete as a practical tool of market manipulation. Subliminal messages can be induced into an audience in much simpler, cheaper, and far less detectable ways.

Perceptual Threshold Management

Director Friedkin and his behavior experts would have found it dangerous to their \$ 14 million investment if they had brought a tachistoscope anywhere near an American theater. They arrived at a much better solution.

Buried within the experimental literature of psychology are experiments dealing with what is called perceptual threshold, an imaginary line that divides a percept into either conscious or unconscious awareness in the brain. This line appears to move about continuously. As we have already considered, humans perceive much information about which they have no conscious awareness.

Theorists speculate that as little as 1/1,000 of a total, single percept registers at the conscious level. The division of information into conscious and unconsciously perceived information is separated by what we can call the perceptual threshold. Substantial experimental data suggests physiological tension, anxiety, fear, and apprehension control perceptual thresholds. As tension within a person increases, he perceives less and less at the conscious level and becomes more and more susceptible to subliminal stimuli. As these tensions decrease, individuals perceive a wider range of information at conscious levels, and appear less susceptible to subliminals. The harder you strain to perceive subliminals, for example, the less likely you are to perceive them.

The tension phenomenon is easily demonstrated. When ready for bed, adjust the radio volume to a comfortable level—neither too soft nor too loud. Lie down and turn off the light. During the next half hour you will readjust the vol-

ume lower and lower every few minutes to maintain a comfortable volume level. As you relax, the radio volume appears to increase, but it is actually your conscious perceptual ability that changes, becoming more sensitive, not the radio. Should you turn on the light, get up, and walk about the room, you would discover the radio will have become barely audible.

The subliminal death mask cut in *The Exorcist* passes through the projector at 1/48 of a second, a speed quite visible at the conscious level to most people who are relaxed. However, the audience's tension or anxiety level was intensified just before the display was used. As mentioned earlier, two thirds of *The Exorcist* audience did not consciously perceive the death masks. Further, what is not consciously perceived appears far more significant to emotional and attitudinal predispositions than what is consciously evaluated.

Symbolism's Subliminal Induction

Another embedding technique used frequently in *The Exorcist* was demonstrated in the scene where the old priest is sitting on the bed in the cold bedroom. As his breath condensed, a ghostly face appeared momentarily in the cloud. The face, apparently drawn on several frames, was also consciously invisible to the audience.

There was much more in *The Exorcist*, however, than merely tachistoscopic and embedded death masks.

In a society where science and technology had become generally accepted as the new religion, it was astonishing how easily the writers and director discredited science and established the devil as an almost preferable alternative. Many viewers described the fantasy destruction of neurological medicine in the clinic scenes as the most "horrifying" portion of the movie. Count was made in several theaters of patrons, leaving for the bathroom or the street during this scene, and in packed theaters, it was never fewer than fifty.

The white, sterile operating rooms, the spinal tap, the injection of radioactive iodine in Regan's neck artery, and the overamplified and quite overdramatized clanking of the X-ray machines helped portray Regan as a pale, trembling, weak, and helpless child in the clutches of impersonal, mechanical contrivances. After the clinic scene, the audience was

prepared to accept the devil by comparison as a kindly, even though a somewhat dirty, old man.

The scene that supplied the coup de grace for science involved the various physicians with their stilted, insincere jargon, lightly camouflaging their ignorance and pedanticism. Unfortunately, there was enough truth in the caricature of modern commercial medicine to make the scene plausible.

The Wipe-out of Reason

One strong factor supporting the movie's success involved an almost primal urge in modern man to believe in the forces of mercy, goodness, and God—even though faith in these concepts has become increasingly difficult to maintain. Many viewers responded to criticisms of the film's fantasy devil being childish nonsense as though their belief in God had been attacked. Though most churches in North America publicly took a strong, antagonistic position toward the movie, many viewers strangely perceived *The Exorcist* as a denouement of material values and a return to religious faith.

The *Exorcist* writers established greater credibility for the devil by representing the story's lead characters as agnostic. Had Regan or her mother, Chris MacNeil, been Catholic, for example, many Protestants, the primary North American audience, might easily have avoided accepting the story. On the other hand, had these two characters been Protestant, it would have put them in the position of being saved from the devil by Catholics—hardly an acceptable idea for most American Protestants.

Further establishing the mother as a credible image in the audience fantasies, the writers made her a glamorous movie and television star who had dined at the White House. Her home was compulsively clean and neat. Though objects were heavily scattered throughout the house on shelves and tables, they were always neat, precise, and never handled or disturbed. In contrast, the urination scene was even more upsetting in this overly neat, tastefully decorated home where toilets never appeared—even in the several bathroom scenes. The urine, of course, was heavily soaped out of the rug by a cleaning woman immediately after the party.

The downstairs was always orderly and clean, and events

that occurred downstairs appeared reasonable and logical. Upstairs, however, was another story. Regan, in her solitary confinement with the devil, was in chaotic surroundings where vomit and drooling spit played upon audience disgust and revulsion toward bodily secretions. This was truly the North American fantasy of what the devil's world would be like. Some, at the unconscious level, however, might have found the disorder attractive.

Between Heaven and Hell

Stairs were important props in *The Exorcist*, symbolic of limbo—the connection between the lower and upper worlds of hell and heaven. Stairs appeared in Father Karras's dream sequence where his mother emerged from a subway station (symbolically hell), behind the house where the motion picture director and Father Karras fell to their deaths, and as the link between the troubled upstairs world invaded by the devil and the downstairs world of reason and sanity. The attic stairs leading up to a dark room cluttered with half-forgotten junk carried Chris to her first contact with the devil.

The outside death stairs were inspected by the detective who climbed from the dark shadowy bottom, where the director perished, to the top which is portrayed in sunlight and openness (symbolically heaven). The priest finally committed suicide by throwing himself out the window, falling at the foot of these stairs. Suicide, of course, is a mortal sin for which the Church must deny the sacraments. Father Karras had, indeed, surrendered himself to the devil.

The staircase in the house, however, was the symbolic fulcrum around which the story evolved. The ascendant devil was living, temporarily, upstairs in Regan's body. The priests had to climb up to do combat with him. And they had to wait on the stairs until the devil was ready.

Various sexual perversions, strongly taboo in the American culture, were cleverly incorporated into the film. Pedophilia, for example (the use of children for sexual stimulation), was a paramount subliminal theme carefully arranged so the audience would not consciously deal with the forbidden subject. Unconscious perception, as pointed out earlier, is peculiarly sensitive to both sex and death taboos.

In the movie, Regan was twelve years old. Her language and actions—genital exposure, masturbation, etc.—were sexually provocative. Throughout much of the movie, she was posed spread-eagled and tied to the bedposts in bondage. Her movements were often quite purposely sensual. As the wounds opened on her arms and legs, they appeared as lash cuts inflicted with a whip. There was even the sound of a whiplash as these wounds appeared. The cut on her leg, however, was also reminiscent of a vagina—the slang terms "gash" and "slit" suggest that the unconscious may associate wounds with the female genitals.

Sadomasochistic themes were quite obvious and shocking, though most viewers repressed the highly taboo real meanings of these scenes. The use of strong taboo sexual symbolism throughout *The Exorcist* was striking. In the attic scene Regan's mother held a candle that ejaculated a burst of flame when the caretaker surprised her. The bedposts in Regan's room cast phallic shadows on the walls.

Other subs simply emphasized supernatural themes. Some bedroom shadows appeared as dark silhouettes of hooded figures like the statues in the Iraq archaeological museum. Many ancient beliefs persist that creatures of hell, such as vampires and demons, cast no reflection. The house was full of mirrors. They appeared in every room, yet Regan's reflection never appeared as she walked in front of the mirrors.

While Father Karras prays in church, a skull-shaped shadow appeared on the white wall behind him. In the hospital scenes Regan's skull appeared repeatedly in the X rays forming the scene's background. During the exorcism scene, Regan rises from the bed with her arms outstretched in the symbol of the cross.

The Devil in Pursuit

Director Friedkin confronts the audience with figure-ground actions that keep them in constant uncertainty and tension. Many viewers approached hypnotic states because of the concentration required to follow the ambiguity. In many scenes it was impossible to be completely certain as to which action was intended as figure and which was intended as ground.

For example, Father Karras walked through the streets to his mother's apartment. Children were playing in the road and in wrecked cars, symbolizing the end of technology. As these scenes cut back and forth, the viewer became quite distracted and more intensely vulnerable to the specific mother-and-son scene that followed. In this scene, introducing Father Karras's guilt over his treatment of Ms mother, appeared the final justification for the devil's pursuit of Father Karras through the child Regan.

The quick-cut transitions in and out of seemingly unrelated scenes formed a mosaic of visual impression that in the advertising business are called the McLuhan Effect or perceptual overload. Familiar examples of the technique are Coca-Cola TV commercials where as many as four scenes are shown in a single frame, different actions continuing in each element of the frame. It is impossible to consciously make sense out of what is going on. The audience's consciousness has been overloaded in order to bypass it into the unconscious, which easily processes very large quantities of data, storing it for later feedback into consciousness.

Director Friedkin heavily utilized subliminal continuity devices that tied the entire film together, in the audience psyche, into a tight, integrated package. For example, the old woman in the carriage that almost ran down the old priest, Father Merrin, had a quickly exposed face similar to Regan's during the exorcism. Father Merrin took a pill after the incident with the carriage, presumably for a cardiac condition, just as he did later in the Georgetown bathroom before the exorcism.

When the old priest moved toward the stopped clock in the Iraq museum, a single pink rose appeared in a white teapot on a table. In the apartment of Father Karras's mother, the wallpaper was covered with pink roses, as was the wallpaper in the bedroom of Regan's mother. There was a single pink rose in the sugar bowl in the apartment of the priest's mother. When Regan urinated on the rug, her mother, Chris, was holding a pink rose. The downstairs of the Georgetown house was full of flowers, suggesting a funeral was taking place. Flowers, of course, are the plant's reproductive organ and symbolize both death and resurrection. In Renaissance art, flowers often represented the soul.

Auditory Archetypes

The Exorcist was remarkable in the way both audio and visual were integrated and mutually reinforced. The sound track, for which the movie won an Academy Award, was a brilliant example of creative subliminal sound engineering. Similar techniques have been used for years in other movies and by the popular music recording industry.

In several dozen interviews with theater employees—refreshment stand attendants, ushers, and ticket takers who had only heard the movie's sound track for several days before actually viewing the film, all reported extreme discomfort from the sound. The discomfort could not be verbally explained, but all agreed it was directly related to the sound track. Each of the theater staffs interviewed reported employees who became ill after finally seeing the film in its entirety—from mild to extreme nausea and hysteria.

Friedkin openly admitted he had used several natural sound effects in the movie's auditory background. One of these, he explained, was the sound of angry, agitated bees. After provoking a jar of bees into excited anger, he recorded their buzzing, then rerecorded the buzzing at sixteen different frequencies. He finally mixed the sixteen frequencies of buzzing together in what might be consciously heard as a single sound—a super buzzing of infuriated bees virtually unrecognizable at conscious levels. This sound of angry bees wove in and out of scenes throughout the film.

Virtually all humans (some much more strongly than others) respond with hysteria, fear, and intense anxiety to the sound of angry, buzzing bees, even if they have never in their lives experienced the actual sound. Many animals respond similarly. Perhaps the strongest verbally definable emotion triggered by the bee buzzing is fear or fright—a near panic-filled desire to run, flee, and escape from the threat. Carl Jung's theory of archetypes suggests that this sound—as the emotional reaction appears to cross cultures—could qualify as an archetypal symbol.

In many cultures the bee has been symbolically associated With death and immortality. In several ancient civilizations, dead bodies were smeared with honey as food for the soul. Indeed, honey was often used as an embalming fluid. Over

many centuries in Europe, bees were prohibited from use in barter for fear they might take offense and destroy crops and flocks in retribution. Bees appeared as symbols of death, fear, and power in ancient Egypt, Germany, China, Greece, Italy, and Japan, in early Christian art, in both Hebrew and Moslem traditions, and in Norse mythology. The Hindu god Krishna was often described as hovering in the form of a bee. Souls have often been thought to swarm as bees migrating from hives.

There is never any conscious awareness, of course, within The Exorcist audience of angry bees buzzing. However, there are easily observable levels of anxiety produced by the sound as it weaves in and out of various scenes. The bee sound appeared, for example, in the scene where Father Merrin first visits Regan's bedroom while he removed various objects from a pouch, symbolically letting the invisible bees out of the bag.

Symbols of Evil

Another auditory archetype mixed subtly into the sound track was the terrified squealing of pigs while they were being slaughtered. Few sounds strike terror so deeply into the heart of man. This sound will affect virtually all humans even though they may never have experienced the squealing or sight of an actual pig. The expression "squealing like a stuck pig" has even gone into the language.

Pigs have been portrayed in various symbolic relationships with man for at least half a million years. Even today, the pig is considered one of the most intelligent of domestic animals—by human standards, of course. The pig, at least for modern man, was cursed by bad table manners that emphasize the pig's filth, greed, gluttony, and lethargy. Nevertheless, in many ancient cultures, pigs were often substituted for human victims during religious sacrifices. A black pig has often been symbolic in Christian art of the devil and Satan. In many civilizations the pig was thought to be a demon that injured fertility heroes in the groin, rendering them sterile. In Celtic mythology pigs were even portrayed as returning to life after being eaten. And, of course, in one of the New Testament's most celebrated exorcisms, Christ drove a legion

of devils into a herd of swine which, maddened, threw themselves into a lake much as Father Karras flung his possessed body out the window.

In addition to the pigs' squealing hidden in The Exorcist sound track, Regan's grotesque, filthy face during the exorcism scene often resembled that of a pig. Further, subliminal reinforcement for the pig symbol is obtained by the word PIG written as graffiti on a ledge at the left side of the stairs looking down behind the house where the deaths occurred. This staircase, and the consciously unnoticed word PIG, appeared many times throughout the movie. Friedkin explained how the sound track often mixed the angry bee buzz with the pig squeals. The two sounds wove in and out of the film, coordinating with the visual.

Embedded in the sound, under the voices and surface sounds apparent in the exorcism scene, was what seemed to be the roaring of lions or large cats. A third of the audience surveyed described a feeling of being devoured or struggling against being devoured. There were also orgasmic sexual sounds in the exorcism scene that appeared to involve both males and females.

Sound is extremely important in the management and control of any group of individuals, certainly for those in a theater. Famed movie director Alfred Hitchcock ranked sound as more vital to the success of his famous suspense movies than his visual illusions.

In a recent Muzak Corporation advertisement, the company actually presented its services, background music for stores and offices, as an "environmental management" technique.

In Western society surprisingly little is publicly known about sound and its effect upon behavior. The consciously available portion of sound frequency ranges from 20 to 20,000 cycles per second—or so advertise the high-fidelity appliance manufacturers. Most theaters have sound equipment that will produce audible sound in this range. As a practical matter, however, few individuals can consciously hear over 17,000 cps or under 200 cps, especially young people whose hearing has been permanently dampened by high-volume electronic amplification.

Sound, nevertheless, can be perceived at each end of the

spectrum beyond the consciously perceived frequencies. Resonance and other sound qualities also play parts in the subliminal perception of sound. To illustrate, some Moog synthesizers are capable of producing sound at 20,000 cps or higher and under 20 cps. You can consciously hear nothing at these high or low frequencies, but if volume or resonance is increased, most people become extremely agitated. If information is included in these subliminal frequencies, it will instantly be perceived at the unconscious level.

Hypnotic Inductions

When normal voice volume levels in *The Exorcist* were reduced, the audience was required to strain or increase attention or concentration upon the dialogue. This is almost a standard hypnotic induction technique, compelling the subject to concentrate upon one sensory data source. The audience uniformly leaned forward in their seats to hear, for example, the charming conversation between mother and daughter in the bedroom scene at the film's beginning. Similarly, many scenes throughout the movie were momentarily out of focus. Again, the audience—like puppets being manipulated with strings—leaned forward, concentrating on the visual images as they tried to correct for the blurred focus. Much of the dialogue between shock scenes was muted or whispered, so as to regain audience involvement.

When humans are led toward hypnosis, they become highly suggestible. Their emotions become more easily manipulated, managed, and controlled the further they proceed along the induction path.

Friedkin utilized little music in the sound track, though he credited works by Hans Werner Henzle, George Crumb, Anton Webern, and five other composers. Like all good background music, the themes were purposely designed for subliminal consumption. The consumption of music and sound generally followed two patterns. One pattern built slowly from plateau to plateau, always intensifying the audience's emotional response. Indeed, in a sample of roughly fifty women who had seen the movie, over half candidly admitted *The Exorcist* excited them sexually. Most cited the sound track as the apparent source of this excitement.

The other general sound pattern abruptly jarred the audience into a tension state. Loud, sharp noises—bells ringing, doors slamming, dogs barking—preceded and followed by extended periods of electronic silence. The sound would gradually increase to a crescendo, then abruptly trail off to nothingness, or cut off sharply. This technique is primarily an attention-holding-tension-building device. Physiological tension was also increased by silences. For example, the early scene in the attic—which was abruptly broken by a loud, sharp noise.

Jumping the sound from one scene to the next—as a continuity and tension-building device, quite similar to the pink roses used visually—was done throughout the film. An important sound jump occurred during Father Karras's first visit to the house. During the preceding scene, in the dream sequence where Karras's mother climbs the subway stairs, the street sound was unrecognizable as a rather high frequency, moderately loud-volume sound. In the next scene where Karras visited the house, the sound was the same except a truck gear shift was heard and the sound increased in frequency. The gear shift identified the background noise, reducing audience tension for the priest's first visit with Regan, where the tension again built toward a tense climax.

Loud Silences

The Exorcist silences were not completely silent. They were electronic silences, with low-frequency background hums. The silences were only silent in contrast to high and increasing volume sequences. These silences also formed a series of plateaus which gradually increased in volume and decreased in time interval as the story moved toward various climactic situations. Silences, like the sounds, were used to produce within the audience a series of emotional plateaus. These silences became louder and louder and more and more rapid as each segment progressed. The tension and release, tension and release, tension and release, always building higher and higher and higher, induced—by itself—exhaustion and even nausea for many in the audience.

Another manifestation of tension management in the audience was coughing. The audience coughed heavily at predict-

able intervals throughout the movie. Audience coughing was recorded at several theaters and always appeared at roughly the same points in the story. This was compared with cough reactions in several other action-type films, *The Sting*, *Executive Decision*, and *Papillon*. *The Exorcist*, in comparison, produced notably stronger and more predictable cough patterns. There were, apparently, subliminal cues in the visual or auditory stimuli that motivated the coughing.

Coughing is a tension release and appeared to occur roughly within thirty seconds after the auditory tension peaks were released. The first sounds of the evil force in the attic sounded like coughing, followed by a rasping bronchial sound. Coughing, of course, can lead to an upset stomach.

The changes of Regan's voice—from that of a twelve-year-old girl to that of the devil—were carefully synthesized with the visual changes in her appearance. At some point during this transition, the girl's voice was replaced by the voice of Mercedes McCambridge, an actress with a deep husky voice. Friedkin admitted to putting the actress's voice through a filter to produce a voice unidentifiable as either male or female.

In other words, the devil's voice was consciously perceived as androgenous, or hermaphroditic. This voice quality would not be meaningful at the conscious level, but would be subliminally apparent. No matter how natural voices are disguised, hypnotized humans are able to identify male or female voice characteristics. It would not be an exaggeration to state that *The Exorcist* visual effects were only props for the sound. A large proportion of the audience recalled the sound with great discomfort weeks after leaving the theater.

Stranger Than Fiction

These pages have included only a handful of the behavioral engineering techniques utilized in *The Exorcist*. Many of the techniques described in this chapter go far beyond merely playing yo-yo with an audience's emotions, during an afternoon or evening's entertainment. They endure far beyond the commercial lifetime of a single movie. What was done to *The Exorcist* audience could endure in some memory systems throughout a lifetime.

On December 8, 1972, a two-paragraph note appeared in The New York Times business section, announcing that In-Flight Motion Pictures, Inc. would initiate the sale of subliminal advertising commercials embedded in the film they distribute. In-Flight is a monopoly corporation that distributes movies to every major airline operating in and out of North America.

Considering the exponential growth patterns of Western behavioral science and technology, we can reasonably assume this is still only the beginning. As a society, we prefer to think of 1984, Brave New World, A Clockwork Orange, and Soylent Green as science fiction and fantasy. But as The Exorcist abundantly demonstrated, modern media-induced truths and realities may have already become far stranger than any fiction ever written.